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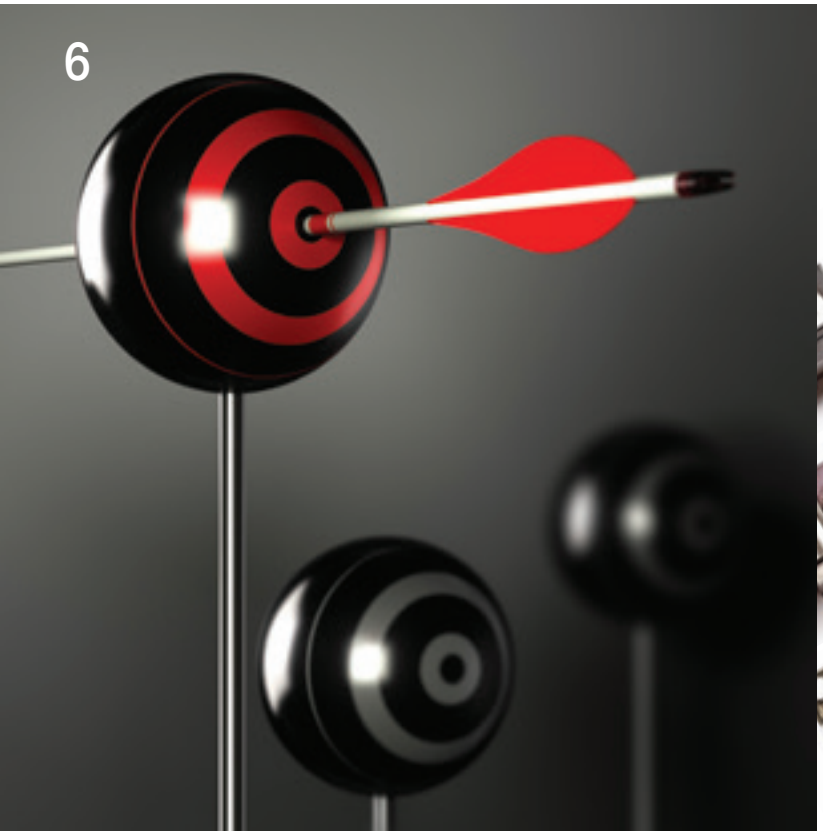

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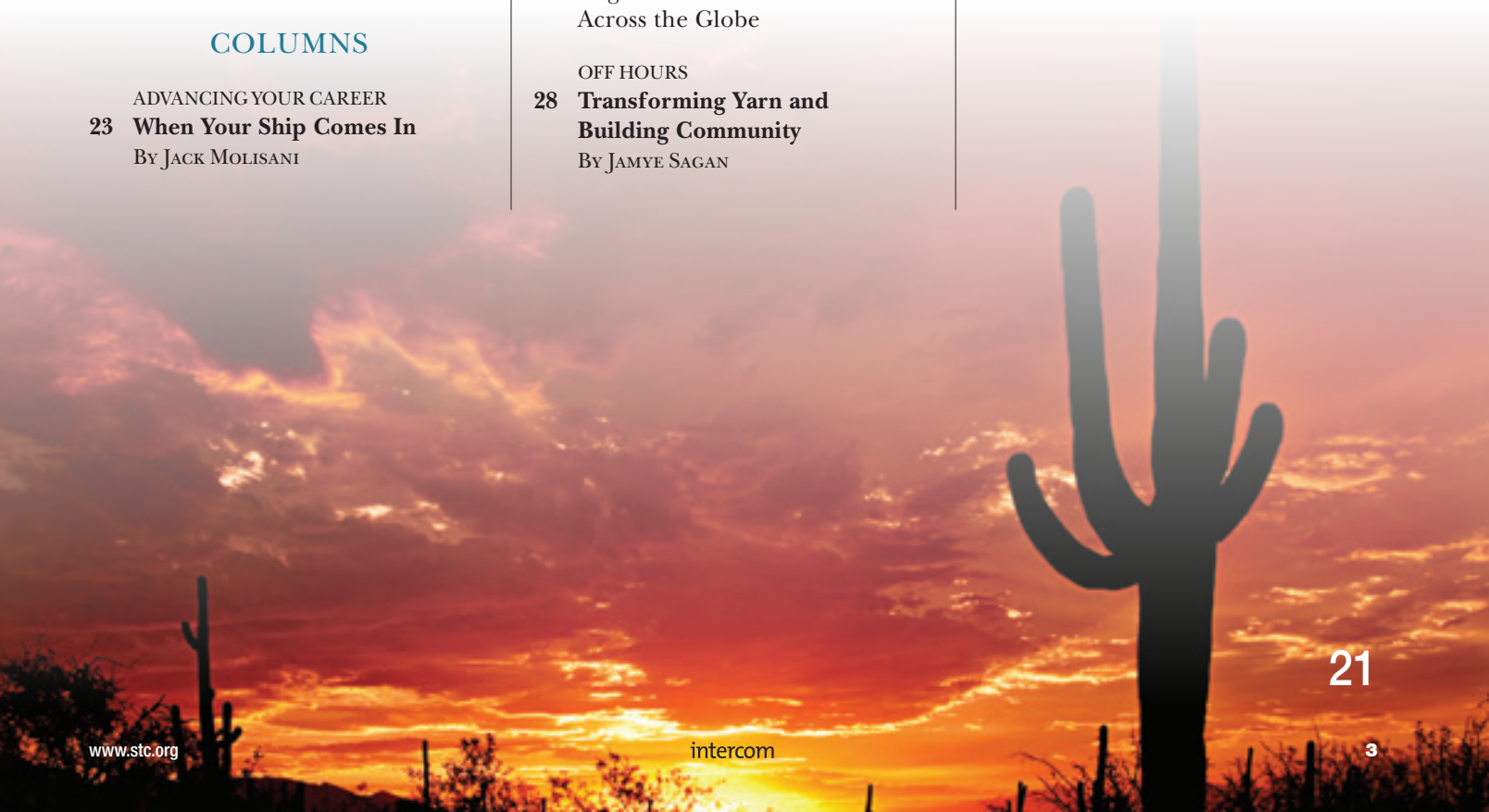

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A Note from the Editor

AS WE START a new year, have you made promises or resolutions to change and improve your work habits or personal productivity in 2014? The articles in this issue of *Intercom* may inspire you!

Alyssa Fox uses the Pareto Principle to explain how to prioritize our focus on the activities that help us maximize our value. In her article, she recommends the following solutions and provides methods for implementing them—separating the urgent from the important, determining the big picture and future impact, eliminating and delegating work, learning to say no, and maintaining productivity. For each month of 2014, Judith Shenouda offers us a 12-step calendar to help us work smarter and live better. Some of her recommendations include getting organized, knowing what makes you unique, expecting and accepting some failures, setting limits, and learning how to give and receive. Crystal Holyn Holdefer asserts that we can understand ourselves better and increase our professional value through self-reflection. By keeping a self-reflective journal of our work practices, she suggests that we can change how we see ourselves and how others (such as supervisors or employees) see us.

Two columns in this issue also relate to personal development. Jack Molisani focuses on the six steps of financial stress reduction and how to build the career you want from a seminar he attended by Chellie Campbell and based on her book, *The Wealthy Spirit: Daily Affirmations for Financial Stress Reduction*. Neil Perlin writes about industry situational awareness for technical communication and recommends several unconventional venues for professional growth and advancing our education in leading technologies.

And don't miss the Society Pages, which include President Nicky Bleiel's midterm report, information on applying for STC awards and honors, and news about the 2014 STC Technical Communication Summit in Phoenix, AZ, in May. The Summit is an excellent way to boost your productivity and professional development. Consider registering now at the early bird discount to save money—another smart new year's resolution! Visit *summit.stc.org* for more information.

—Liz Pohland
liz.pohland@stc.org

intercom

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Publisher Society for Technical Communication
Editor Elizabeth E. (Liz) Pohland
Assistant Editor Kevin Cuddihy

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Scott Abel, *Meet the Change Agents*
Andrea Ames and Alyson Riley, *The Strategic IA*
Thomas Barker, *The Academic Conversation*
Nicky Bleiel, *The Essentials*
Jack Molisani, *Advancing Your Career*
Neil E. Perlin, *Beyond the Bleeding Edge*
Linda Roberts and Lisa Pappas, *All Access*
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SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION
9401 Lee Highway, Suite 300
Fairfax, VA 22031-1803
+1(703) 522-4114 | +1(703) 522-2075 fax
Send questions and correspondence to the editor at the above address. General information about STC: stc@stc.org *or* www.stc.org.

Address Changes: membership@stc.org
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Prioritizing Your Focus to Maximize Value

By ALYSSA FOX | *Senior Member*

WE ALL WANT to be productive. But what is it that you're producing? Is your output meaningful and important, or is busy work taking over your day? In a time where everyone is doing more with less, how do you juggle all of the tasks thrown at you from a million different directions?

When starting to prioritize your own work, think about the larger context. What are your boss's priorities? Your team priorities? Your company priorities? You need to prioritize your work in a way that lines up your tasks with the bigger picture. The value of your work is directly related to how well it lines up with your organization's priorities, so it's imperative that you prioritize your work well—not only for your sanity's sake, but your career's as well.

Applying the Pareto Principle

The Pareto Principle states that 20% of your activities provide 80% of the value. Unfortunately, most of us get caught up in working on the other 80% of tasks, fighting daily fires and responding to urgent requests rather than important ones. So how do we move from focusing on those activities that don't provide much value to focusing on fewer activities that provide more bang for our buck? We need to apply the Pareto Principle to ensure we are spending time on the things that give us the most value, our company the most value, and our customers the most value.

Most professionals rarely have more than two to three hours a day to focus without interruption. Your focus and your time are valuable when you are at work, so you need to protect them by using them well. You might have heard before of the jar illustration when discussing priorities. If you are given a jar, along with rocks, pebbles, sand, and water, how do you fill up that jar? Do you put the rocks in first? The water? How do you fit the most of those items into the jar? Ideally, you would start with the rocks first, since they are the largest. Put as many of those in your jar as you can. Then add pebbles to fill in the space between the rocks. Sand is even smaller and more porous so it can slide between rocks and pebbles. Finally, fill the remaining space in the jar with the water.

In terms of prioritization, the rocks are your highest-priority items. There are relatively few of them, but they take a lot of time, energy, and concentration. In return, they deliver the greatest possible results. For example, you might submit a proposal to executives to restructure your team or develop a list of requirements for a new product. The pebbles are important activities that support the rocks and help you get the results you want. These take less room in the jar, but you need more of them to get the rock items done. Examples of pebbles might include communication with your team for their ideas on that proposal or market research to see what competitors your new

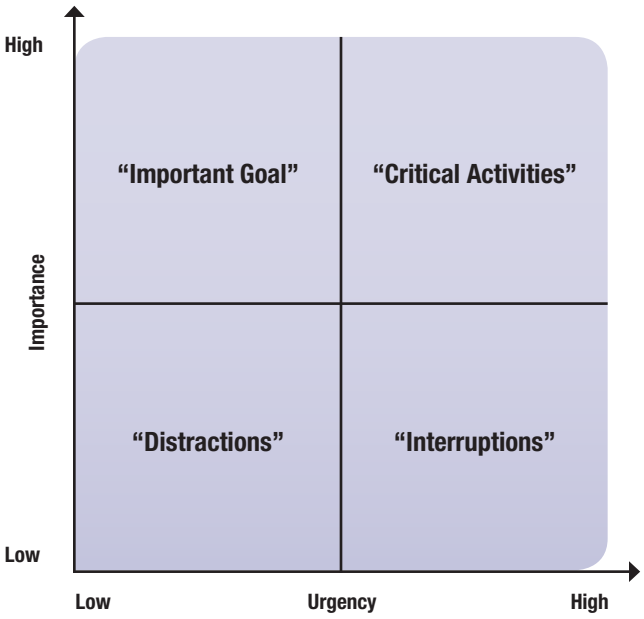
product might have. Sand is the fun stuff—the things you like to do and make your daily work life enjoyable. Tasks like helping coworkers, checking industry blogs, and planning the company party might be relevant, but they require little effort and don't return high-value results. Finally, water is the clutter in your life—things that people perceive as "must do," but bring little results or satisfaction. Water items can easily take up all your time because they are never-ending—filing, checking email, and attending unimportant meetings. These items are generally the 80% of your activities that bring 20% or less of the value of what you do.

Separating the Urgent from the Important

Most of us fall into the trap of working on urgent things so much that we neglect the important things. It's easy to get caught up in the myriad requests we have from others throughout the day, and before we know it, another work day has ended and we have made no progress on our important projects.

As Walt Disney once said, "Everyone needs deadlines." People tend to work on tasks that have a deadline first. If your important work is not deadline-driven, consider breaking it down into tasks and assigning deadlines to those.

The following grid helps us determine where the focus of our work is going and see where we might re-prioritize some items.



To assess your current focus, complete the following steps:

1. List all the activities and projects that you feel you have to do. Try to include everything that takes time at work, however unimportant.
2. On a scale of 1-5, assign importance to each of the activities. Judge importance by how well that item helps you meet your goals and objectives.
3. Evaluate each activity's urgency using the 1-5 scale.
4. Plot each item on the grid according to the importance and urgency values you gave it.
5. Study the grid to determine where you might need to shift focus to ensure you are spending more time on your important work.
6. Use the strategies for different quadrants of the grid defined below to help you rework and schedule your work according to your set priorities.

Urgent and Important Tasks

As the grid defines this quadrant, the items here are critical activities. Some of the urgent and important tasks you can foresee, and others you can't. Obviously, planning ahead helps reduce the number of last-minute items. Ensure you leave some time in your schedule for unexpected issues or crises that might arise.

Urgent and Not Important Tasks

These tasks are the "firefighting" tasks that keep you from doing your work and achieving your goals. Consider rescheduling, delegating, or eliminating these tasks.

Not Urgent but Important Tasks

These tasks help you achieve your personal and professional goals, and should be where you spend most of your time. Set aside sufficient time to work on these tasks so you have time to do them properly, avoiding procrastination so these tasks do not turn into urgent ones.

Not Urgent and Not Important Tasks

These items are distractions and you should avoid them wherever possible. Some of these might be things others want you to do, but they do not contribute to your own goals.

Determining the Big Picture and Future Impact

Keeping the big picture in mind throughout your prioritization process is necessary to ensure you are heading down the right path. You must continually reassess how your work fits into the overall goals of your organization, and adjust and readjust accordingly.

Another way to determine what should be your highest-priority tasks are to define the future impact of that task. What will completing that task gain you in a week? A month? A year? Five years? If you see no or low future impact for a task, it is likely something to remove from your plate.

To help yourself think about the big picture, you can ask the following questions:

- Why am I here?
- What should I be accomplishing?
- What is my major goal or objective right now?
- What results am I hoping to get from this?

To help yourself determine the future impact of a task, you can ask these questions:

- Does this task contribute to my most important goals?
- How will this task impact my work for the next few months? Few years?

Eliminating and Delegating Work

High-priority work should always come before low-priority work. If you cannot complete all of your high-priority work, you must eliminate or delegate some of the work on your plate. You can't indefinitely continue to take on new responsibilities without getting rid of others.

If you did the grid exercise, you likely had tasks in the Not Urgent and Not Important category. You can simply ignore or cancel some of these. Others might require you to politely tell someone no if you can. Be aggressive with removing these distractions from your task list. If something ends up being more important, it will come back up later and you can re-prioritize it at that time.

When delegating work to others, ensure the person to whom you're delegating has the ability to do a great job on that task. Then delegate the result. The process is none of your business. In other words, tell them what you want the outcome to be, then step back and let them arrive at that outcome in their own way. This type of delegation removes the minutiae of the process from your task list, gives authority to the person to complete the job, and helps them make their own decisions.

Learning to Say No

When removing low-priority tasks from your workload, learning to say no is a valuable skill. At times, it is appropriate to tell others no politely, if the task they are asking you to do does not contribute to your high-priority goals. You can also encourage them to solve the problem themselves and help them get started.

If the task is important, sometimes you might need to say no for now, but can take on the task later. If that's the case, schedule some time to talk with them when you are available. Scheduling a future appointment will keep them from distracting you now, and free up your time for working on higher-priority items now for longer without interruption.

On a short-staffed team, it's often difficult to take on additional tasks without something else being affected. In this case, providing alternative options is a good way to say no without saying no. For example, try one of the following:

- "I can do that, but this other project will be delayed."
- "I can do that, but we will have to cut scope to make that date."
- "I can do that, but it will take more time."

Maintaining Productivity

Working productively on our high-priority tasks should be repeatable and maintained. We must be vigilant to not let the urgent take over the important, and every so often revisit our task list and re-prioritize those tasks.

Our natural tendency is to do the easiest things first. Resist that impulse and focus on the things that are important. Set aside time to work on those important things, and let the little things go—through elimination or delegation.

When you receive an unplanned item to add to your task list, evaluate its importance and urgency using the grid method. Then add the item to your list in the appropriate place based on its resulting priority, rather than letting it jump ahead of the items you have already planned.

Prioritizing your tasks frequently is the key to good time management. Taking action on your high-priority tasks ensures you meet your professional goals. And meeting your professional goals helps your projects to move smoothly, your stress to be soothed, and your work to make a real difference.

ALYSSA FOX *is director of information development and program management at NetIQ Corporation in Houston, Texas. Her interests and skills include technical communication, user experience, process improvement, project management, and agile development practices. Alyssa is a member of the User Experience Professionals Association (UXPA), a senior member of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), and is currently serving as STC Secretary. Find Alyssa on Twitter* @afox98.

FURTHER READING

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Make This Your Year to Work Smart and Live Well

By JUDITH SHENOUDA | *Senior Member*

IT'S A BRAND NEW YEAR and, as always, it gets busy fast. There is so much to do and time slips away just keeping up the usual routine. But this year can be different. You can pause, stop, and reflect. You can give yourself the space to figure out where you are heading, shift gears if you like, and even change direction.

In fact, that's what I did several years back when the Great Recession hit. Projects were completed and new ones were delayed. I had the gift of time to think about ways to get out of my home office and out of town more frequently. Too much alone time writing and editing publications and managing a business was getting old. I remembered the joy of teaching years prior and thought that I would like to introduce more discussion, more conversation, and more human interaction into my life—not as a full-time teacher but as a presenter of seminars, webinars, and other talks.

I wondered how I could transition from a schedule filled with writing and editing publications, managing projects, and keeping a business humming along to one that included speaking gigs. If I could remember how I transitioned from teaching and academic support positions to technical communication and business ownership, maybe I could apply the same strategy to this new transition. By pausing, stopping, and reflecting, I mapped out 12 steps that, I believed, could get me from where I was in my career to where I wanted to be, from current state to future state. This 12-step process became a book (*Career Success in 12 Easy Steps: A Journal*) that is now my reservoir for ideas when crafting talks and writing articles, such as this.

In 12 steps, in 12 months, in just one year, you too can make progress. This can be your year to work smart and live well.

January—Get organized.

Start the year by doing what you likely do very well—get organized. Get a journal with lots of white space. Buy one that inspires you with motivational phrases, creative graphics, or probing questions. If you like, make your own. Whatever the form or shape of this paper or electronic journal, this will be your space to make notes, doodle, and dream. When you're thinking through an issue, this is your place to capture ideas, satisfactions, and dissatisfactions; to identify areas that need a shift in focus, a change of direction, or a different perspective. This journal will become your resource, your repository to collect and, in time, to recollect.

February—Build yourself up.

Look around you. What have you created that makes you feel especially good? Did you transform some disastrously written input into a readable, usable masterpiece? Is someone who was floundering at work, at home, at school, at the gym, or in your community now thriving as a result of your involvement? If you look and listen, you're likely to discover many artifacts—proof positive—that show you make a difference. Use your journal to note what you have done or are currently doing that is evidence of your good works. This month, begin to list your successes—small and large—and build yourself up. And remember, you get to define success in your own terms.

March—Know what makes you unique.

Pay attention to the full range of your capabilities. Some of them might be the same as or similar to those of others. Yet no two people are exactly the same. Your strength may be in how you approach your work, how you organize it, or how you strategize. Perhaps your aptitude in grasping complex concepts allows you to communicate with experts at a high level. Maybe your knack playing—and often winning—at cards, poker, mahjong, or chess helps you create interesting training activities. When leaving a job many years ago for a new endeavor, the boss remarked, "Someone will take your place, but you cannot be replaced." That is true for each of us. Now get your thoughts down in your journal. Note the ways in which you are unique.

April—Create a roadmap.

With the first quarter of the year behind you, how are you doing? Recollect. Look back at your journal to see the issues that you are addressing, the shifts you want to make, and the direction you want to take. Next, create a roadmap. Identify where you are now on the map and the potential destinations. Include some road signs on your map. Where is the bump in the road, the caution, or the stop sign? At what juncture might you want to slow down or change directions? Remember, you can follow one road and, for whatever reason, decide to change direction. You can discard one map and simply create another.

May—Be fit.

To travel from where you are to where you want to go, you need to be fit in body and mind, at play and work. In your journal, design your own fitness routine, and then remember to exercise and practice regularly. Some days you may do a bit less. Other days you may do a bit more. You may stumble and face setbacks, but get up and keep going. The idea is to make progress on your own wellness journey. You want to have the energy, strength, and wherewithal to move your work and life in the desired direction.

June—Draw from the fullness of you.

Open the compartments. Open the doors. Transfer ideas. Let one area of your life touch, inform, and enrich another area. When you are crafting examples to help your audience understand a complex concept in a theory guide, deciding on an appropriate organizational pattern for the marketing collateral you are writing, or considering the best media for distributing content, draw from the breadth and depth of your knowledge and experience. Apply what you have learned from previous projects and seemingly unrelated pursuits—at work, at home, or in the

community—to new endeavors. Draw from the fullness of your knowledge and experience to do good work.

July—Be a go-to guy or gal.

Who are your go-to people at work? Often, they are not necessarily those with the title of supervisor, manager, or boss. They are individuals you can comfortably and easily approach with your dilemma, your confusion, or your concern. You trust that you will be heard, that you will benefit—in some way related to this person's expertise, character, intelligence, or other talent—from the conversation. Name these go-to people in your journal. Jot down what you can learn from them and then apply when others seek you out for advice or wise counsel. Whether you know if or not, you are likely someone's go-to guy or gal.

August—Make it manageable.

Technical communicators make anything and everything manageable—and do so better than anyone else. After all, demystifying and simplifying the complexities of products and processes is just another day at the office. Finding relationships among the parts of the whole, showing how the whole works, and transforming gobbledygook into logical steps is our forte. So, go ahead and use this ability to make your own world manageable. Just as I came up with 12 steps to career success in the book I authored and used those steps as a launching pad for each month's action in this article, you, too, can come up with a plan for whatever you want to accomplish. Use your journal to get your preliminary ideas into words or pictures and, from time to time, revisit, refine, and polish.

September—Expect even your best plans to go awry.

This month, the third quarter of the year closes and, no doubt, you have noticed that some of your best plans have gone awry, which is to be expected. I'm surprised when others are disturbed at the many irritations that surface—the job is more complex than anticipated and is taking longer and costing more; the subject matter experts are not prepared with input at scheduled meetings; the reviewers are changing correct grammar to incorrect grammar. On and on it goes. Stop being surprised and annoyed. Instead, anticipate what can derail your plans. You might create a three-column table in your journal. In the left column, write down the potential roadblocks or obstacles to success. In the middle column, consider the workarounds or the contingencies. In the right column, add your notes or reflections—the obstacle never occurred, a different issue arose, the workaround was a success, or the workaround was a failure. The idea here is to get it down in your journal, keep your wits about you, learn, and move on.

October—Set limits.

You, like all of us, have limitations and boundaries. There are only so many hours in a day, days in a week, and weeks in a year. You can do a lot, but you cannot do it all. So set your own limits. Create your own boundaries. And when the limits and boundaries are trespassed—and they surely will be—don't be surprised. Don't be upset. Have a contingency plan that allows for interruptions, and add this plan to the table you started last month in your journal. This month, use your journal to plan an ideal 24-hour day. List what must be included: basic needs, recreation, home responsibilities, work responsibilities, and anything else. Have a line item for a daily treat—that little something extra that makes each day worthwhile. Add a range of time to each item on your list. Remember that you have 24 hours—that's it. This should be sufficient time to do what you must do as well as what you love to do.

November—Give.

As a technical communicator, you have so much to give—truly. The guides, manuals, procedures, online Help, plans, reports, training modules, website content, and much more that you research, write, edit, publish, and distribute are a gift to the end user and other audiences in need of this information. Making the world of products, processes, services, technology, and so many complexities manageable—what you likely do, day in and day out—is a gift that keeps giving. No doubt, you've heard team members reading your publications comment, "So this is how it works." You may have watched an engineer follow each step of a procedure you skillfully crafted. And you can only imagine the relief of the product user who finds the solution to a problem in the content you wrote with precision and clarity. So continue to give. Do it with a smile. Do it with gratitude that your work and you make a difference.

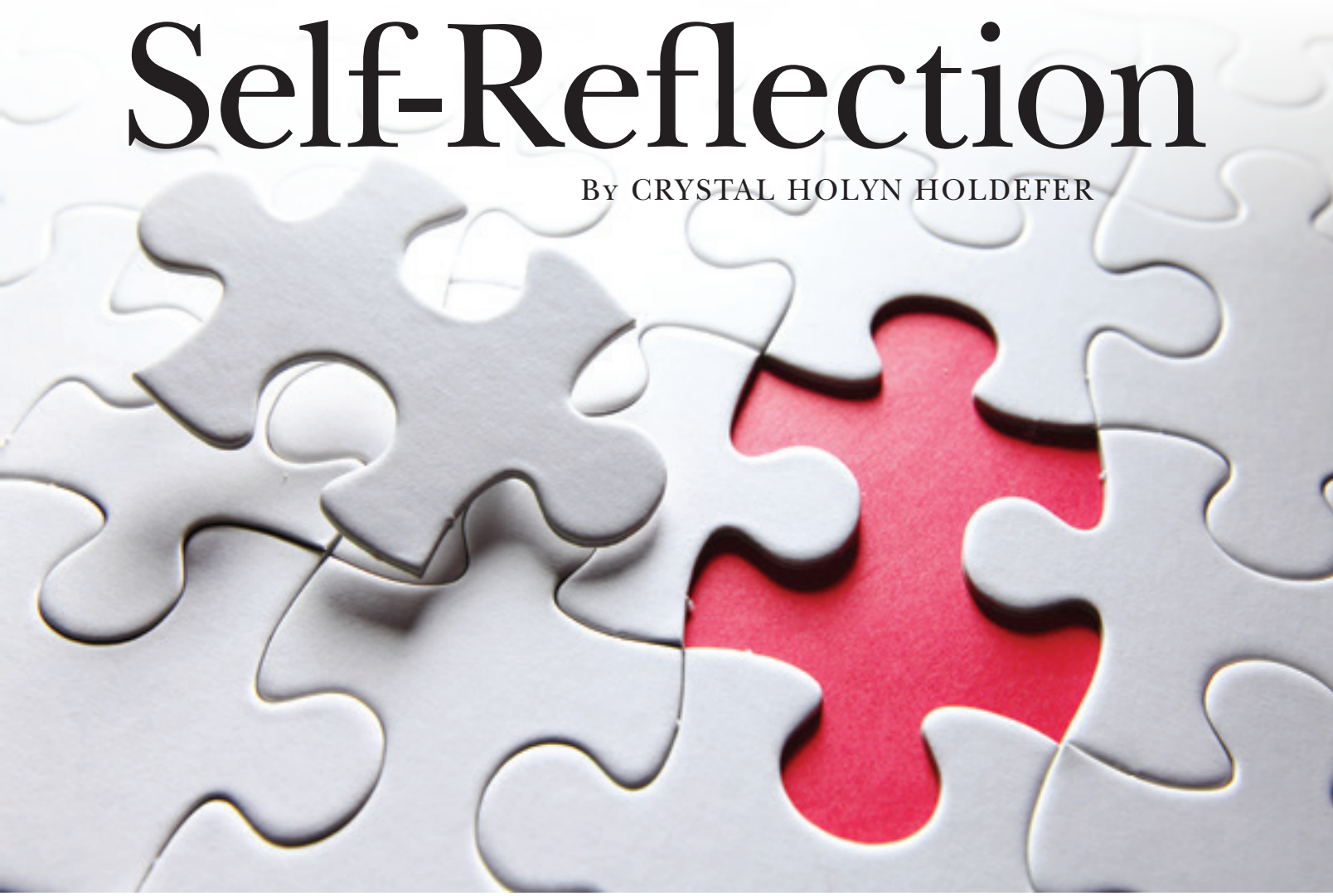
December—Receive.

Look through your journal and recollect. What does your journal tell you? Did you work smart? Did you live well? Consider the ah-has and the insights you gain from reading your journal a gift to yourself. Wrap up the year by noting the highlights, the lessons learned, your successes, and your progress. You can be your own best teacher, guide, and coach. You can be your own best friend. Now, in the spirit of the holiday season, receive the wonder of you.

JUDITH SHENOUDA *(*Shenouda@easescommunication.com*) is owner of Shenouda Associates Inc. (*http://easescommunication.com*), a business that helps its clients research, write, and edit the professional publications that launch products, streamline processes, and promote brands. Judith has achieved recognition as a Toastmasters International Advanced Leader Bronze and Advanced Communicator Bronze and is co-founder of Thinking Forward (*http://thinkingforward.us*), a troupe of professional speakers. Judith presents seminars and webinars on topics related both to her business and the book she authored and published,* Career Success in 12 Easy Steps: A Journal.

Understanding Yourself and Increasing Your Professional Value THROUGH Self-Reflection

By CRYSTAL HOLYN HOLDEFER



HAVE YOU EVER put together a large jigsaw puzzle with a lot of pieces? At least one puzzle piece is always difficult to place. It isn't a corner puzzle piece, but one of the middle puzzle pieces that looks too similar to the other puzzle pieces to stand out.

Employers see technical and professional communicators as that confusing middle puzzle piece because they don't know where we fit in their companies. We need a way to make our placement clear to our employers, and one of the ways we can do this is by showing them what our professional value (or worth) is to the company; however we don't always know exactly what our professional value is or how to explain that professional value to other people. In this article, I focus on using self-reflection as a tool to help you understand yourself and as a tool to increase your professional value.

Self-Reflection

If you have ever tried to understand yourself better by stepping back from an experience and deeply considering why you were feeling a certain way or why you did something, then you were using self-reflection. *Self-reflection* in its simplest form is asking yourself thought-provoking questions so that you can develop a deeper level of understanding about yourself. We may engage in self-reflection when we are unsure about something, when we feel like we could have done something differently, or when we want to remind ourselves what we are doing well or what we have accomplished.

What Type of Self-Reflection Should You Use?

While self-reflection has been used by managers through group sessions (Rigg & Trehan) and by nursing students through structured questions (O'Callaghan) and written assignments (Honey, Waterworth, Baker, & Lenzie-Smith), self-reflection has also been used by pharmacy students through journals (Bouldin, Holmes, & Fortenberry). Alicia S. Bouldin, Erin R. Holmes, and Michael L. Fortenberry—two female research assistant professors and a male telecommunications analyst—had the students in their communication course use self-reflective journals (which included feedback) because they recognized that it had "potential in developing skills in communication, critical thinking, self-learning, self- and social awareness, empathy, and sensitivity to cultural differences" (p. 2). We, as technical communicators, should use self-reflective journals in work practice, but without feedback. Without feedback, self-reflective journals become more isolated for technical and professional communicators, but this isolation is more appropriate for our work practice because it allows us to use self-reflective journals in our own time and it keeps our writing private.

Using Self-Reflective Journals in Work Practice

To create a self-reflective journal, you usually choose a notebook to write your self-reflections in. However, if you prefer typing, you can also create a self-reflective journal by typing out your self-reflections in electronic documents. Once you've chosen whether to use a paper notebook or an electronic document, you can then choose any of three situations to reflect on. These three situations are:

- Positive Work Situations (Situations where you reflect on a positive experience that you've had at work, such a task you did well. These reflections help you create more positive experiences.)
- Negative Work Situations (Situations where you reflect on a negative experience that you've had at work, such as a mistake that you feel you made or a time when you wish you'd done things differently. These reflections help you create strategies to do better.)
- Work-Related Tasks (Situations where you reflect on a task that you performed recently at work—such as typing up a report, meeting with a client, or giving a presentation—in order to find out how and why you're better at doing the task. These reflections help you feel more positive about yourself.)

While all three of these types of self-reflection involve asking and answering certain kinds of questions, the questions vary for each type. To explain how to reflect for each type of situation in more detail, I will use the next three sections to talk about each one in turn.

Self-Reflection on a Positive Work Situation

Start the journaling process by thinking about one situation at work where you really succeeded. Next, figure out what factors (or reasons) led to your success by asking and answering questions about the situation. These questions can be found in Table 1.

Questions

1. Why did I succeed?
2. Why did I succeed this time as compared to other times?
3. What motivated me to do well?
4. How did I feel after doing well?
5. Did I feel more in control this time?
6. Did I receive any reward or praise from doing well? (If not, would I have felt more motivated if I had?)

Table 1. Self-Reflective Questions for a Positive Work Situation

After you've found out what factors contributed to your success, analyze why you think these factors were present. For instance, if you found out that being more prepared contributed to your success, you would then think about what factor caused you to be more prepared. This thinking may then lead you to discover that you were more prepared because you came into work with a game plan on what needed to be done that day.

Once you've taken some time to understand why these factors were present, you then apply what you've learned to figure what your next active step will be. When you are trying to figure out what your next active step will be, focus on how you can repeat your success. Using the example from before, you may figure out that coming up with a game plan was the key factor to your success, and so your next active step could be to make this type of preparation into a habit.

Self-Reflection on a Negative Work Situation

Start by thinking about one situation at work where you made a mistake. Next figure out what factors led to your mistake by asking and answering questions about the situation. These questions can be found in Table 2.

Questions

1. Why did I make a mistake?
2. Is the reason emotional? (Was I having bad day/distracted/nervous/tired?)
3. Is the reason lack of knowledge? (Was I unsure how to do something ?/Did I miss a step?/Did I forget to double-check my work?)
4. Is the reason accidental? (Did I not know that what I did was wrong?/Did I misunderstand the directions?)

Table 2. Self-Reflective Questions for a Negative Work Situation

After you've found out what factors contributed to your mistake, analyze why you think these factors were present. For instance, if your mistake was misunderstanding written

directions because those directions were new to you, you would then ask yourself if this problem had ever occurred before. Mistakes will happen on the job no matter how much you prepare yourself for them, but self-reflecting on a negative work situation helps you recognize when you are making the same mistakes and when you need to make a change so that you won't be seen by others as incompetent.

Using the example from before, one of the changes that you may make is to try rereading the directions more carefully or to try asking the person that knows (and probably wrote the directions) to clarify when you're having trouble understanding.

Self-Reflection on a Work-Related Task

Start by thinking about one recent task that you did and then focus on *your professional learning* (how you've changed or improved) by asking and answering questions. These self-reflective questions are in Table 3.

Questions

1. How is my professional learning improving? (This may include, but is not limited to, improvement in writing, in the ability to complete assignments, in the ability to explain directions to others, or in communication skills.)
2. Has my employer or any of my coworkers said anything to me about my work? Did they mention that they liked something that I did or did they give me some advice?
3. If they liked what I did, did that action come through naturally or was it something I've been working on?
4. If they gave me advice, was that advice constructive enough to use?

Table 3. Self-Reflective Questions for Professional Learning

While the other types of self-reflection were focused on figuring out what your next action step would be, professional learning self-reflection can make you feel better about yourself while also making you more open to others. You may remember a positive comment from your employee and feel more confident in your skills, or you may decide to listen to some constructive advice from a coworker. Not everything that coworkers advise us on may be based on good intentions, but sometimes listening to advice from people who are more experienced can be a benefit.

For example, I've always had difficulty leaving work when it's time to go home, and in the last week my coworker commented that staying late too many times would take away from my own time. I followed his advice and decided to try to leave when work was over, and I've actually had more time to get other things done. Listening to the advice of others gives us something to work on and may lead to us doing our work better than before.

Why Self-Reflection Is Effective

If self-reflective journals sounds like additional "busy work" to you (Bouldin, Holmes, & Fortenberry, p. 1), then consider this suggestion from Lynn W. Zimmerman. Zimmerman, an associate professor of education, suggests that the aim of self-reflective practice is "transformation" (p. 46). Through self-reflection we can change how we see ourselves and how other people see us.

Changing How We See Ourselves

The article, "Reflection and Learning: Characteristics, Obstacles, and Implications" published in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, an education philosophy, theory, and research journal, presents that the "primary process by which humans experience emancipation [(freedom from inhibition and convention)] is self-reflection" (Denton, p. 848). This emancipation is caused by:

- Your improved self-confidence
- Your stronger sense of control
- Your increased passion for your work

Your self-confidence increases because you discover what your accomplishments are, what your skills are, and how your skills and knowledge have improved. You feel a stronger sense of control because you create "coping strategies" (Honey, Waterworth, Baker, & Lenzie-Smith, p. 452), or ways to handle difficult situations. You feel more passion for your work because you change from being a passive worker to being a self- motivated worker that sets goals.

Changing How Others See Us

The article, "Using the Power of Student Reflection to Enhance Professional Development" published in *The Internet Journal of Allied Health Sciences and Practice*, a peer-reviewed, open-access, and allied health and education journal, paraphrases that in "the profession workplace… employers value skills and qualities" (Zimmerman, Hanson, Stube, Jedlicka, & LaVonne, p. 1). Our employers want us to succeed in their company, but they also want us to be valuable employees. Self-reflection increases our professional value because it helps us:

- Explain what we do, what we've accomplished, and how we contribute to the company's growth
- Make fewer mistakes or show that we are putting in the work to improve
- Learn skills in problem-solving, analyzing, and critical thinking so that we are valuable assets for company projects

The positive change in how you see yourself, a gained sense of control, and recognition by others can also make you feel more comfortable in your workplace, which can encourage you to take on more difficult tasks in order to learn from them.

Conclusion

Self-reflection in work practice is not without its limitations. At first, you may struggle using self-reflection because it requires

a deeper level of thinking and because you may not have any previous experience with self-reflection. With this struggle in mind, I included the guided questions so that you can begin to understand what types of questions lead to deeper understanding and action. Getting used to self-reflective journaling may take some time, but the more you use this approach, the easier it will eventually become. Changing how our employers see us through the use of self-reflective journals may be just the tool for our employers to finally understand where we fit into their company puzzle.

CRYSTAL HOLDEFER *is a graduate of East Carolina University (with an MA in technical and professional communication) and is a writing consultant at ECU's University Writing Center (UWC). She recently wrote an article, "Using Communication Qualities in Your Tutoring Sessions: How to Become a Better Speaker and Listener," which was published in the UWC's tutor manual. This paper has been read by new writing consultants and has helped them become better writing consultants during their sessions. You can email Crystal at* holdeferc08@students.ecu.edu *or at* holdefer18@gmail.com. *You can also follow her on Twitter* @CrystalHoldefer.

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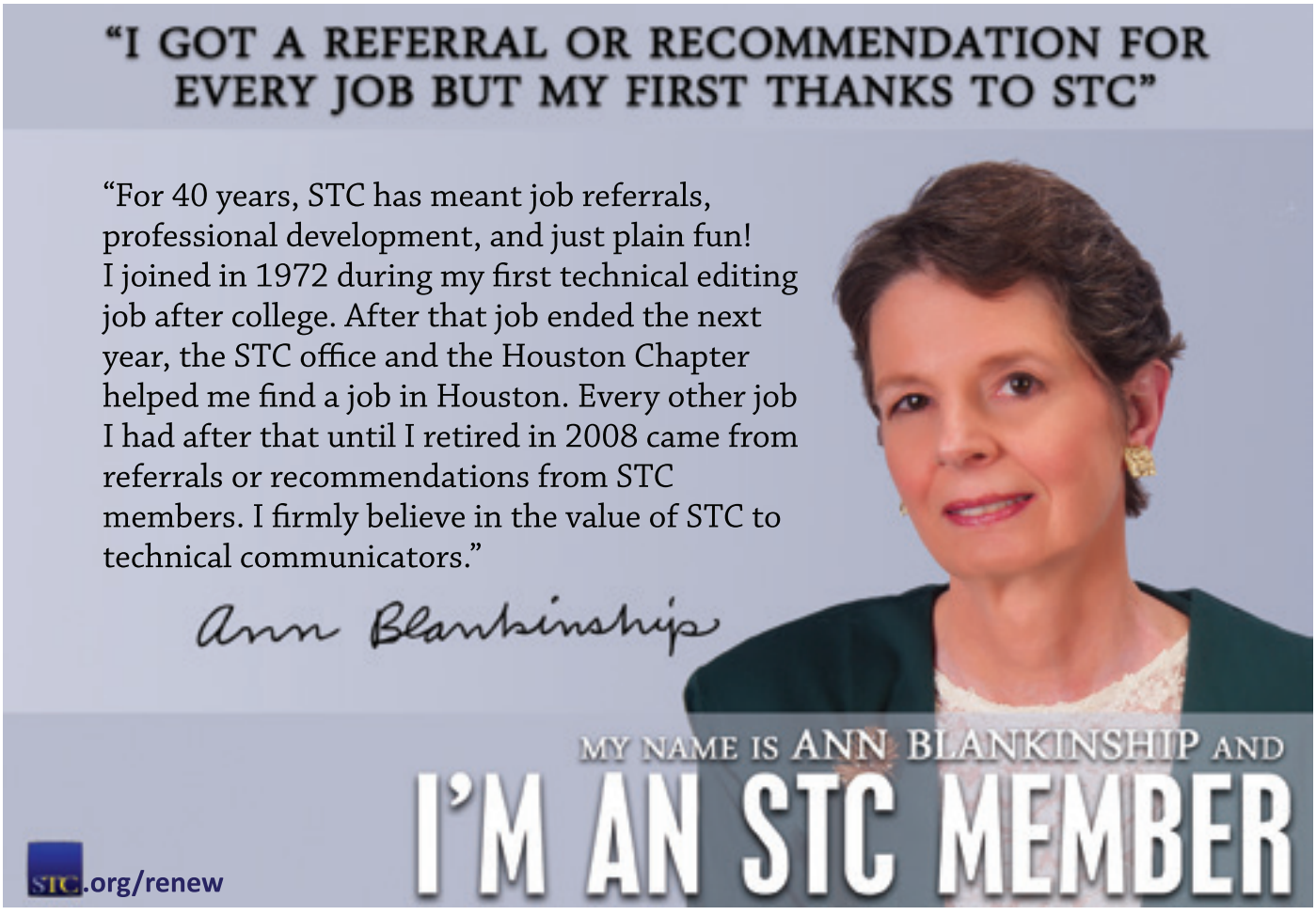
"I GOT A REFERRAL OR RECOMMENDATION FOR EVERY JOB BUT MY FIRST THANKS TO STC"
"For 40 years, STC has meant job referrals, professional development, and just plain fun! I joined in 1972 during my first technical editing job after college. After that job ended the next year, the STC office and the Houston Chapter helped me find a job in Houston. Every other job I had after that until I retired in 2008 came from referrals or recommendations from STC members. I firmly believe in the value of STC to technical communicators."
Ann Blankinship
MY NAME IS ANN BLANKINSHIP AND
I'M AN STC MEMBER
STC.org/renew

President's Midterm Report

BY NICKY BLEIEL | *STC President*

I AM HONORED to continue the tradition of the President's midterm report and I am pleased that there is so much good news to share with all of you.

STC celebrated an important milestone in 2013—our 60th anniversary—but we did anything but rest on our laurels. We spent the entire year positioning the Society for Technical Communication for the next 60 years and beyond.

Chris Lyons, our new executive director, came on board in May, just as the 2013 Summit kicked off in Atlanta. If you were an attendee you may have met him, because he tried to meet as many attendees and exhibitors as possible. He and the entire STC staff have been working hard all year to grow our programs, membership, initiatives, and publications.

Membership

Membership was up in 2013 (for the first time in several years) and we offered a discounted "early bird" membership rate for 2014 that was under $200. That offer was very popular and we are looking forward to continued growth in STC's membership numbers.

Education and the Summit

STC's educational offerings continue to be expanded, with new live Web seminars, online courses, and virtual conferences being added all the time. The preliminary program for our annual conference and premier event—the Technical Communication Summit—has been posted, with additional sessions and events being planned by Conference Chair Chris Hester and Program Manager Paul Mueller. For more information about the Summit, which will be held 18–21 May 2014 in Phoenix, AZ, see *http://summit.stc.org/*.

Initiatives

STC has expressed its support for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) initiatives. We recently sent a letter to the White House Office of Science and Technology to promote the fact that technical communication is intrinsic to STEM-related education and economic growth. We plan to continue working in this area. Additionally, STC is supporting the Center for Plain Language in their efforts to have the Plain Regulation Act, HR 3786, enacted. This law, similar to the Plain Language in Government Act that STC supported in 2010, would require federal regulations to be written with greater clarity.

A number of partnership agreements with technical communication–related organizations have been signed or are in negotiation. These partnerships focus on expanding cross-association access to education and events. We hope to provide the opportunity for our members to take advantage of offerings in potential areas of specialization and also to open the door for members in other associations to take STC classes and consider STC membership. Agreements have been made with tekom, American Medical Writers Association, Association of Proposal Development Professionals, Association of Independent Information Professionals, The American Society of Indexers, and Sigma Tau Delta—The National English Honor Society.

The Student Outreach Task Force (led by Sally Henschel and Michael Opsteegh) is exploring how STC can better attract and serve student members. This task force began its important work immediately after the Summit and will report to the Board in early 2014.

The STC Board and staff gathered information about our membership and the profession in a number of ways, including a member survey launched in July, our new Advisory Council (which had its first meeting at the Summit in May), consultation with thought leaders and the leaders of other organizations, research, and thorough examination of all of our existing programs.

Direction and Mission

Turning toward the future, I am proud to unveil STC's new mission statement. This statement and the focus areas position STC to effectively serve both the discipline of technical communication and our members. This statement was developed by the STC Board of Directors and the

staff—our next step will be to develop a detailed action plan and then execute it.

STC Mission Statement

The Society for Technical Communication advances technical communication as the discipline of transforming complex information into usable content for products, processes, and services.

STC serves its members by identifying and promoting best practices in the field and by demonstrating the economic value delivered by technical communicators. By providing lifelong learning opportunities, we help our members develop their skills and competencies so that they may advance in a variety of career paths.

To achieve this mission, we focus our efforts in these areas:

- Offer continuing education that enhances the competencies and skills of our members and enables lifelong learning
- Foster the means and opportunity for technical communication professionals to succeed in today's workforce and to grow into related career fields
- Define and publicize the economic contribution of technical communication practices to businesses and governments
- Promote the concept that technical communication training develops foundational skills and fosters in practitioners habits of analysis, discernment, and problem-solving that underpins their ability to successfully perform in many fields
- Manage the operations of the Society in a sound and sustainable manner, investing strategically to enhance our ability to deliver member value

I think you will agree that the STC stage is set for success in 2014 and beyond.

Thanks for your kind attention—and for being a member of STC. I hope to see you in Phoenix at the Summit!

2014 Technical Communication Summit Conference-at-a-Glance (18–21 May 2014, Phoenix, Arizona)

	Saturday, 17 May	Sunday, 18 May		Monday, 19 May		Tuesday, 20 May		Wednesday, 21 May
8:00 AM	8:00–5:00 Preconference Certificate Sessions and Workshops (optional pricing)	8:00–4:00 Leadership Program (preregister; optional pricing)	8:00–5:00 Preconference Certificate Sessions and Workshops (optional pricing)		8:30–10:30 Education Sessions		8:30–10:30 Education Sessions	8:30–12:30 Education Sessions
9:00 AM				9:15–5:00 Expo Open		9:15–5:00 Expo Open		
10:00 AM							10:30–1:00 Break. Visit the Expo Hall!	
11:00 AM					11:00–12:30 Communities Break. Visit the Exhibit Hall!			
Noon		(Final Schedule TBD)						12:30–2:00 CLOSING LUNCHEON (ticket required)
1:00 PM					1:00–4:15 Education Sessions		1:00–5:00 Education Sessions	
2:00 PM								
3:00 PM								
4:00 PM								
5:00 PM				5:00–6:00 Annual Business Meeting				
6:00 PM		5:30–6:45 OPENING KEYNOTE GENERAL SESSION						
7:00 PM		7:00–8:30 Expo Ribbon Cutting & Welcome Reception in the Exhibit Hall				7:00–7:30 HONORS RECEPTION (free)		
8:00 PM						7:30–10:30 HONORS BANQUET (ticket required)		

What's New at the Summit

WHETHER YOU'VE BEEN to one Summit or 30 (as a few of our longtime members have) there's bound to be something new waiting for you in Phoenix! There are a few things that are new to everybody this year.

Revamped Preconference Education

This year STC offers four certificate courses as part of our preconference education on Saturday and Sunday, but adds an "a la carte" option to two of them as well. The courses are broken up into four workshops, and you can sign up for a full certificate course and take all four or sign up for any of the workshops as a single event. There will also be extra workshops unrelated to the certificate courses available.

Shorter Sessions

This year all Summit sessions are 45 minutes instead of one hour. This change responds to feedback from attendees and follows the schedules of related conferences.

Spotlight Sessions

This new format allows speakers to share a powerful message or story in a short time with a large audience. The Summit will offer three spotlight sessions at the same time, in different rooms, on the last day of the Summit. These sessions will be in larger rooms, accommodating up to 300 attendees in each session. After 20 minutes, a short break will be provided so attendees can change rooms, if desired.

Communities Break

This year the Communities Reception will take place in the Expo on Monday afternoon from 11:00 AM–12:30 PM. The Communities Break allows attendees to learn more about our Special Interest Groups and includes beverages and food.

Join us in Phoenix from 18–21 May and see what else is new. And if you've never been to a Summit before, come add your name to the "new" list!

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION SUMMIT'14
STC's 61st Annual Conference

Does Your Community Have Innovative Activities? Apply for a Pacesetter Award!

BY TRICIA SPAYER | *Chair of Pacesetter Committee*

STC'S COMMUNITY PACESETTER Award recognizes the successful implementation of innovative community operations. STC offers the Pacesetter Award because the Society values the improvement of community operation, and especially when beneficial innovation can be shared with other communities so that they can enjoy similar benefits.

The Pacesetter activities for this award year should have been implemented within the 2013 calendar year. This can be an ongoing activity, but must have been implemented in 2013 to receive an award.

All STC communities are eligible for an award. The due date for the application is 25 March 2014.

Following are some questions your community might ask:

Can my community apply for Pacesetter and Community Achievement Award in the same year?

Yes. The two awards are not mutually exclusive. While the CAA recognizes established practices, the Pacesetter Award recognizes innovative activities.

Why should our community apply for a Pacesetter Award?

The award proves that your community is creative in providing services to its members through new technologies, methodologies, or strategies. You are not content with the status quo. You are cutting-edge, connected, involved, unique, and inventive. You know that

what you are doing benefits your community, the mission of the Society, and that other communities should be using your ideas.

That, and it's really cool to go up on stage at the STC Honors Banquet to be recognized. The award gives you bragging rights to put into your newsletters, websites, and marketing materials.

What are some examples of Pacesetting activities?

The following are some examples of previous Pacesetter awards:

- Collecting, formalizing, and sharing the knowledge and wisdom of members in an encyclopedic resource of best practices for all technical communication professionals, but especially for their SIG members.
- Reaching out to STC members with special needs and disabilities; supporting those members by developing an excellent Accessibility Guide for the annual conference; setting an example for all STC communities by creating a highly accessible SIG website; and for contributing to the accessibility of the Society website.
- Adapting Agile methodology to community management by allowing volunteers to accept manageable tasks, leaders to track progress regularly, and the community to achieve more in an organized and constantly improving way.

For more examples, visit the STC website or search the Internet for "STC Pacesetter Award" (better results without using the quotes). You will find a myriad of proud communities' explanations of their Pacesetter awards.

Where Can We Find More Information?

Look at the Guidelines and Application posted on the STC website for details, *www.stc.org/membership/recognition/awards/1178-pacesetteraward*. Questions? Ask the Community Achievement Awards/Pacesetter Committee (Tricia Spayer, chair) at *stc.caa@gmail.com*.

Call for Entries for the 2014 International Summit Awards

BY ELIZABETH BAILEY | *International Summit Awards Committee*

THE SOCIETY for Technical Communication's International Summit Awards (ISA) competition is accepting chapter or regional entries through **31 January 2014**. To qualify, the entry must have been produced or substantially revised within 24 months prior to 1 September 2013 and won an Award of Excellence or Distinguished Technical Communication Award at a local or regional STC competition in 2013–14. All STC ISA entries must be submitted using the online submission form at *http://summit.stc.org/competitions/*.

We continue to use the same four categories of entries:

- Informational Materials
- Instructional Materials
- Promotional Materials
- User Support Materials

Information on these categories and rules for all entries, including information specific to submitting electronic entries, can be viewed on *www.stc.org/membership/recognition/competitions*; click the "STC ISA General Information and Rules" link under the Resources header.

If you are submitting paper-based entries, once you have completed the online submission form, send entries that qualify for the STC ISA Competition to:

STC International Summit Awards
c/o Elizabeth Bailey
3101 Gaylord Pkwy
Frisco, TX 75034

Each physical submission must include:

- **Four** copies of each entry
- A completed online entry submission form **for each entry** (with a printed copy of the completed entry submission form attached to **each** of the four copies)
- A payment via check(s) made payable to STC or an online credit card payment. Nonrefundable fee per entry in U.S. dollars only:
  - $75 members
  - $125 nonmembers
  - Add $15 per hard copy entry submission. Posters larger than 11x17" are exempt from the hard copy fee. STC encourages entries to be uploaded electronically using the online entry form to avoid the $15 fee.

When paying by check, please mail a printed copy of the online entry submission form with the check to:

STC
c/o Lloyd Tucker
9401 Lee Highway, Suite 300
Fairfax, VA 22031

Entries that win a Distinguished Technical Communication Award at the international level will be displayed at the STC Summit in May. The Best of Show winner will be recognized at the Honors Banquet at the STC Summit. All entries will receive written critiques from qualified technical communicators regardless of award level. Entrants say that written critiques are the most beneficial part of submitting an entry.

For more information, please see *www.stc.org/membership/recognition/competitions* or contact the Entries Manager Elizabeth Bailey at *bethbailey6@gmail.com*.

Attending the Summit?
Visit the "Old Pueblo," Tucson

BY BRENDA HUETTNER | *Fellow*

JUST A BIT south of Phoenix (~120 miles), Tucson offers a lot to see and do. If you have an extra day or two to spend in sunny Arizona, come visit Tucson, the "Old Pueblo." We've got history, nature, technology, arts, and some of the quirkiest neighborhoods you'll ever see.

History

Tucson history actually started over 4,000 years ago with the native Hohokam Indians. You can still see evidence of their influence and art in the petroglyphs easily visible in the Tucson mountain passes. By the early 1700s, Spanish missionaries came and built our "White Dove of the Desert," Mission San Xavier del Bac—the oldest continuously occupied mission in the country. It's famous for its longevity but also for the beautiful murals and sculptures that adorn the building. There's a hiking trail up a small hill right next door, and a Tohono O'odham market right across the street that sells hand-woven baskets, native jewelry, and fry bread.

Eventually, Spanish soldiers followed the missionaries and established Fort Lowell in August 1776. You can still visit the site and museum at Fort Lowell Park, or stop by Presidio San Agustín del Tucson, one of our downtown landmarks.

Photo by Daquella Manera

El Presidio Park.

Ranchers and miners had an influence, too. The ranch house at Aqua Caliente Park, Tucson's warm spring oasis, was once a popular resort where people from the city could come out west for their health. It's been a cattle ranch, an alfalfa farm, and is now a county park open to everyone.

And of course, we've got a strong flavor of the Wild West! So strong, in fact, that many classic Western movies were filmed here in Tucson or at the nearby Old Tucson Studios. Sarsaparilla, anyone?

Nature

Tucson is set in a Sonoran Desert valley surrounded by five mountain ranges, so it's cooler than Phoenix in the summertime. We're surrounded by national parks, including Coronado National Forest, Catalina State Park, Ironwood Forest National Monument, and Saguaro National Park (home of the giant saguaro cactus). You can hike, bike, camp, bird-watch, and do all manner of outdoorsy things. A short 45-minute ride up Catalina Highway puts you at the top of Mt. Lemmon, home of the nation's southern-most ski resort. Though there won't be snow in May, the ski lift runs all year as a "Sky Ride" with fantastic panoramic views of the mountains.

Science and Technology

Tucson is home to all kinds of science and technology. Just north of Tucson is Biosphere 2, a domed, self-sustaining environment designed to facilitate studies of how various environments work together. Just south of Tucson is Kitt Peak, the world's largest collection of optical telescopes, including 24 optical and

Saguaro National Park at sunset.

two radio telescopes representing eight astronomical research institutions. Just to the west we have the Arizona Sonoran Desert Museum, a combination zoo, natural history museum, botanical garden, art gallery, and aquarium. And on the southeast side we have the Pima Air and Space Museum, one of the largest air and space museums in the world. It turns out that the hot, dry, desert air is great for preserving old planes!

Arts

Tucson has a thriving artistic community and an entire neighborhood (the downtown Warehouse Arts District) devoted to supporting the arts. Tucson has its own ballet

Dick Arnold

Tucson's iconic Gateway Saguaro.

company, symphony, opera company, and several professional theaters. We have more than 215 art groups and organizations and over 35 art galleries in the downtown district alone. Need a bit more curation than that? You can visit the Arizona State Museum, the Center for Creative Photography, the Tucson Museum of Art, and the University of Arizona Museum of Art. No wonder the *Wall Street Journal* called Tucson a "mini mecca for the arts."

Neighborhoods

Like all cities, Tucson has a downtown area with lots of buildings, people, and traffic. It's unique in that there's a story to go with almost every building you see. For example, John Dillinger and his gang were apprehended in the Hotel Congress. It's still a hotel, with a bar, nightclub, café, and a huge variety of local talent playing on the outdoor patio. Across the street, the Rialto Theater started as a vaudeville stage but quickly offered movies to the Tucson public starting in 1920. It's still a popular performance venue today.

Historic neighborhoods surround the downtown area. Armory Park neighborhood dates to the early railroad days; Dunbar/Spring is still rife with adobe homes; and Menlo Park, though definitely a downtown neighborhood, is also home to our signature "A Mountain" (a mountain with a giant "A" on the side), the stunning Tumamoc Hill, and the Santa Cruz River Park

Another great neighborhood is the 4th Avenue district, with dozens of unique local restaurants, bars, shops, and other small businesses. 4th Avenue has become such a local tradition that there is even a documentary about it by Alan Williams called *The Avenue*. It's a great introduction to the things that make the avenue and Tucson unique and well worth a visit!

Need more info? Check out *www.visittucson.org* for complete listings and links to Tucson activities.

Getting Support from Your Supervisor

WOULD YOUR EMPLOYER be willing to pay all or at least part of the expenses of attending the Technical Communication Summit in Phoenix, AZ, from 18–21 May? It couldn't hurt to ask! Consider writing a memo to your supervisor that explains how you and your employer would benefit from your attendance. The following model is based on a memo that worked for its author. Feel free to modify it for use within your company.

In addition to the below memo, STC has created an executive summary that provides all the basic information about the Summit—a synopsis of the event, a daily schedule, and a preliminary list of sessions by track. You can download the document at *www.stc.org/images/stories/pdf/2014-summit-primer.pdf*; we invite you to print it out and include it with your request to help show your supervisor the full breadth of the event.

Dear [your supervisor's name]:

I understand that our company is cutting back on training costs and we are looking for ways to get the most for the money we spend in every area. There is a cost-effective professional education conference in May that will help [your company] reduce expenses in translation costs, structured authoring, project management of reports and publications, as well as several other areas.

I would like to attend the 2014 Technical Communication Summit in Phoenix, AZ, on 18–21 May, presented by the Society for Technical Communication. The Summit is packed with more than 80 sessions over the three full workdays with topics covering all aspects of technical writing, editing, project management, and publication production. The preliminary program is currently available, and when the full schedule of sessions is released in February, we can go over the list together to determine which ones will benefit the company most.

With most conferences, the challenge has always been to get to as many of the higher-priority sessions as possible. That's where the Summit is different! STC now includes Summit@aClick in the registration fee. This is an online collection of the conference's content. It's like being able to bring the entire content of the conference back to share with the rest of the company. This increases the value of my participation tenfold. Not only does it capture the audio and visual presentations of the speakers, its content can be shared and revisited for a year after the conference.

Costs:

[List transportation costs, registration fee, cost of meals, and the price per night of the hotel room. The conference room rate at the conference hotel is $164.]

Summary of Benefits for [your company]:

With the current economic conditions, everyone at [your company] is being asked to do more and control costs wherever possible. This conference is a small investment in empowering me and others involved in [technical communication efforts] to do even more. The sessions will provide us with more knowledge of report production, editing, writing, management concepts, and government contracting. This knowledge will enable us to handle [a particular client or project] with more professionalism and confidence, which will reflect favorably on [your company]. And with Summit@aClick, I will be able to pass on much of this information to coworkers—it provides me a recording of most of the sessions after the conference, so I can return to areas of interest over and over again as needed and share it with colleagues.

Thank you very much for considering this request.

When Your Ship Comes In

BY JACK MOLISANI | *Fellow*

IN MARCH 2003, I attended an STC regional conference where the keynote Chellie Campbell was to speak about Financial Stress Reduction™ and how to build the career you want. I thought, "Financial stress reduction? Boy, I could use some of *that*!" and looked forward to attending her keynote.

The presentation was both entertaining and useful, distilling what is often a whirlwind of conflicting financial advice into six basic concepts. I was so impressed with her approach that I immediately bought her book *The Wealthy Spirit: Daily Affirmations for Financial Stress Reduction* (available on Amazon), and then went on to take her financial stress reduction tele-class.

It's been 11 years since Chellie autographed my copy of her book, and I don't go a day without applying what I learned. With the author's permission, I am sharing her six steps to financial stress reduction.

1. Think Positive

Like mind over matter, mind over money begins with believing you deserve it and can get it. You must practice daily *positive* money and success affirmations, such as "People love to give me money!" "Money flows to me like water from a faucet." And "I win often and I win big!"

I have to admit, I was a bit skeptical at first, thinking affirmations were for yogi who spent days sitting on the floor chanting, "Ohmmmmm." But when faced with a new datum, I try it for myself and see if it works or not.

So I started doing my daily affirmations, and one thing I noticed immediately was how many *negative* thoughts about money and success I had. Some were quite subtle in their negativity, such as "I wish I owned an airplane" (the unstated affirmation being I'd never have an airplane).

Then Chellie drove home an important point: you have to state affirmations in present time: "I *am* a success." "It's the end of the month and I have all this money left over!" "I am a qualified candidate magnate." (The last one I made up to help me find candidates when recruiting.)

She explained, "If you see a sign that says, 'Free Beer Tomorrow,' when do you get the free beer? Never! But if you state you *are* a success, that you *have* the money you want, you create a reality that the physical universe then manifests."

I also started noticing the affirmations of those around me. I'd go to an event where there was a raffle and hear people say, "I never win anything"—and they don't! Once at such an event,

This column addresses job hunting and career advancement, focusing on various aspects of career growth. It's written from the perspective of someone who has been a technical writer, technical communication manager, and recruiter, and who worked as a captive (full-time) employee and an independent contractor before finally starting his own company. If you have questions or suggestions for a future column, email them to *jack@prospringstaffing.com* with "Career Question" in the subject line.

I really wanted the prize they were raffling, so I bought twice as many raffle tickets as everyone else and reminded myself that I win often, and I win *big*! I won the raffle.

Did I win the raffle because I bought more tickets than everyone else, or because I envisioned them calling my number, envisioned walking up to the front of the room, envisioned holding the prize in my hand? I say all of the above. Nothing you envision will make a pot of gold magically appear in your living room. But if you think positive affirmations *and* do the work, the world responds. OK, maybe it *is* magic. But you have to do *both*. Which brings me to the next step.

2. Send Out Ships

Have you heard the saying, "When my ship comes in"? Any idea where the saying comes from? In the 1800s, merchants in England would mortgage everything they owned to build and outfit a ship and send it off to the New World. When it came back loaded with rum and furs and spices, the merchants would become rich beyond their wildest imagination.

But they didn't have ship-to-shore radio back then, so the merchants never knew when their ship would return. They'd literally be waiting for their ship to return.

I know plenty of people who are sitting on a proverbial dock waiting for their ship to come in, *but they aren't sending any out!* You have to send out ships!

And you can't just send out *one* ship, as there are hurricanes and sand bars and white whales all waiting for a chance to scuttle a ship, so you have to send out multiple ships to ensure some come in.

Every time I write an article, speak at an STC chapter event, speak at a conference, I'm sending out a ship. Some come in quickly, while some take years. The trick is to keep sending out ships!

3. Count Your Money

Money is a game and you have to know the score. The money score will tell you how well you're doing steps one and two.

In additional to watching your balance sheet, Chellie also recommends keeping a "ships log," or an ongoing record of how many ships you have to send out before one sails in. In my staffing business, I discovered it takes about 30 calls or emails to clients before I find a client who has a job I can help fill. (Note that 30th client rarely called me with the job. I had the call *them*.)

Knowing it takes 30 calls (29 nos before I get a yes), I look forward to clients who tell me no. When I call a client and get my first no, I think, "Great! I only need 28 more!"

Count your money, count your ships.

4. Swim with Dolphins

Chellie suggests all people can be grouped into three categories: dolphin, sharks, and tuna.

Dolphins are fun to work with, are happy to pay you for your services, and they'll even help ward off a shark attack.

Sharks aren't inherently evil, they are just eating machines. Never try to be a shark in your business deals. You'll never be as sharky as a shark is, and that blood you smell in the water will probably be from a bite of your own tail.

Tuna are just shark food. Ever meet someone who just sucks the energy and enthusiasm from a room when they enter? Tuna. Ever ask someone how they are doing and they respond with how unfair life is and then blame everyone for their lot in life? Angry tuna.

Swim with dolphins, avoid sharks and tuna.

5. Survive the Storms

You must weather the storms, both internal and external. And let's face it, there will always be storms, setbacks, recessions. Build your reserves for the proverbial rainy day and tough times. Events prepared for aren't crisies, they are just cyclical dips that you can weather—*if* you are prepared.

Important note: Don't stop your positive affirmations once you start "making it" or when you momentarily fail. That's when you *really* need to think positive; perhaps even double your daily affirmations.

Remember, the universe delivers what you envision. Sometimes the universe just takes longer and needs a little more envisioning than normal. Persistence is key.

6. Seek Balance and Enlightenment

Being rich with no joy in your life is no way to live. Being content with no money for food or rent is equally no way to live.

I have met people who say they want to start a nonprofit organization and do good works, but they don't have any money to start an organization *with*. Money isn't inherently good or evil, it's what you do with it that matters. But you have to *have* money before you can do good works with it.

In contrast, working seven days a week to make money is another end of the same continuum. All money (or just enough money) but no joy, no leisure, no family time is also not the secret to success. Few people lay on their deathbed thinking, "I wish I had spent more hours working." Seek balance and enlightenment.

In Conclusion

Think positive thoughts. Send out ships. Count your money. Swim with dolphins. Survive the storms. Seek balance and enlightenment.

Sounds pretty simple, huh? Guess what? It is.

JACK MOLISANI *started his career as project officer in the space division of the United States Air Force managing $100M+ contracts and is currently the president of ProSpring Technical Staffing, an employment agency specializing in engineers and project managers at* www.ProspringStaffing.com. *Jack is the author of* Be The Captain of Your Career, *published by Precision Words Press. Pre-release sales start 1 March 2014 on* Amazon.com *and in bookstores on 1 May 2014. Follow Jack on Twitter:* @JackMolisani.

Situational Awareness in Technical Communication

BY NEIL PERLIN | *Fellow*

"KNOWING WHAT'S GOING on around you in order to be aware of threats and opportunities."

The concept of "situational awareness" can mean life or death for pilots and, less melodramatically, for technical communicators as well. We may not have to worry about missiles, but we do have to worry about new technologies and business developments. In other words, we need to keep up. This is a common topic in technical communication and I've written about it before, but I want to discuss a few new ways to do so in this column.

For many STC members, STC's annual conference, the Technical Communication Summit, is an excellent way to keep updated because the Summit covers the full breadth of the field. However, if you cannot attend the Summit, there are several STC regional chapter conferences, such as Spectrum in Rochester, Mid-Atlantic in Philadelphia, and the relaunched Interchange in Boston that make excellent and affordable substitutes.

In addition, there are two additional organizations and conferences familiar to many technical communicators.

The American Society for Training and Development (*www.astd.org*) —ASTD is a 70-year-old group, like the trainer's version of STC, and a good source of information because of the increasing overlap between training and tech comm.

The Association for Computing Machinery Special

This column presents overviews of new technologies that may affect technical communicators in the near future. If you have feedback, or would like to suggest topics for subsequent columns, please contact Neil Perlin at *nperlin@concentric.net*.

Interest Group for Human-Computer Interaction (*www.sigchi.org*)—ACM's SIGCHI is a society for professionals, academics, and students interested in human-technology and human-computer interaction (per the SIGCHI website). The conference is more academic and research-oriented than STC and ASTD, but it is also thought-provoking for practitioners.

These venues are comfortable and familiar to many of us, but I suggest that technical communicators need to look into additional venues that let us expand into areas that are unfamiliar today but may be our bread and butter tomorrow. (For example, in 1990, no one anticipated that the W3C would play such a huge role in tech comm because of HTML.) These areas may include such paths as responsive design, analytics, mobile, or any emerging areas. Here are my recommendations for a few such new venues:

Mobile Monday (*www.mobilemonday.net*)—MoMo is an open community that focuses on the mobile market, technology, and trends. The community started in Helsinki in 2000 and now has chapters in over 140 cities around the world, with many holding sessions on Mondays. The site lists a wide variety of topics and cities, including (as of 25 November 2013) The Future of Mobile in Brisbane; Data and Analytics in Tel Aviv; Online Payments in Lagos, Nigeria; and Mobile Video in Rennes, France, to list just a few. None of these topics seems directly related to tech comm, but consider that technical communicators can now convert our help systems to mobile using familiar help authoring tools, that we're slowly starting to integrate analytics (like Google Analytics) into browser-based help, and so on. The MoMo topics aren't as futuristic as they sound. I try to attend meetings in Boston and wherever else I happen to be and have never left one of the meetings without something to think about.

Technology "incubators"—Governments, colleges, and companies support "incubators" because high technology is seen as an economic path to the future. In the Boston area, for example, we have the Boston Web Innovators Group (WebInno) at *http://webinnovatorsgroup.com* and the MIT Enterprise Forum of Cambridge at *www.mitforumcambridge.org*. These venues aren't limited to high-tech hubs like Boston, either. For example, Vermont has the Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies (VCET) in Burlington at *http://vermonttechnologies.com*. Look around to see what's available near you. Check your city or state's business roundtable or high-technology forum. What you find may be a source of new ideas. And many of the meetings are inexpensive. For example, the WebInno events are free under certain conditions and you can join the MIT group for $20, $95, or $195 depending on your job role.

What might you find at these venues? Each meeting is different, but here are examples of what I've seen at past events:

- A fly-casting app that demonstrated the capabilities of iPhone accelerometers.
- A quick (under a minute) and inexpensive way to scan 3D objects to produce rotatable 3D images. (The company was showing off its product by scanning attendees. The URL shows a 3D scan of me using Hypr3D's face scanner at WebInno32: *www.hypr3d.com/models/4ed5b34bf7fac30001000022*.)
- The ViziApps GUI app authoring tool (*www.viziapps.com*), the app equivalent of Flare or RoboHelp. (In the interest of full disclosure, I'm a consultant with ViziApps.)
- Social networking through an app (*www.trovare-inc.com*) that programs a bracelet that contains a proximity sensor that detects other bracelet wearers with similar interests within about 30 feet, potentially a useful tool for conference organizers.
- 3-D modeling tools for general use, others focused on medical applications.
- Data visualization and modeling software.

Summary

Many of these new products may be totally irrelevant to your needs (although the 3-D imaging might be very useful if you do hardware documentation). More important is the industry situational awareness that you'll get by attending these venues. They may not put you on the leading edge, but they will show you where that leading edge is located.

NEIL PERLIN (nperlin@nperlin.cnc.net) *is an internationally known consultant, strategist, trainer, and developer for online content in all forms from traditional online help to mobile. To this, he brings 34 years of experience in tech comm, 28 in online formats and tools past, present, and future (having represented STC to the W3C). Neil is MadCap Certified for Flare and Mimic, Adobe Certified for RoboHelp, and Viziapps Certified for the Viziapps Studio mobile app development platform. He provides these services through his company, Hyper/Word Services* (www.hyperword.com). *He is an STC Fellow and the founder and manager of the Bleeding Edge stem at the STC Summit.*

Mark Your Calendar

Organization events across the globe

F.Y.I. lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to *intercom@stc.org.*

1 27–30 January
The **Annual Reliability and Maintainability Symposium** (RAMS) 2014 will be held at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, CO. This year's theme is "Engineering Customer Trust." For more information, contact:
RAMS
+1 (603) 863-2832
www.rams.org

2 13–17 February
The 2013 **American Association for the Advancement of Science** (AAAS) Annual Meeting will take place at the Hyatt Regency and Fairmont hotels in Chicago, IL, from 13–17 February. For more information, please contact:
AAAS
+1 (202) 326-6450
meetings@aaas.org
http://meetings.aaas.org

3 22 March
The 2014 Mid-Atlantic Technical Communication Conference and Workshops, hosted by the **STC Philadelphia Metro Chapter**, takes place 22 March at the Giant Conference Center in Willow Grove, PA. For more information, please contact:
STC-PMC
www.stcpmc.org/conference

4 25–30 March
The **American Society for Information Science and Technology** (ASIS&T) will hold the IA Summit in San Diego, CA. For more information, contact:
ASIS&T
asis@asis.org
http://2014.iasummit.org/

5 29–30 March
The **STC New England Chapter** hosts the annual InterChange conference on 29–30 March at the UMass Lowell Conference Center in Lowell, MA. For more information, please contact:
STC New England
interchange@stcnewengland.org
www.stcnewengland.org

6 13–16 April
The **International Society for Performance Improvement** (ISPI) will hold its Performance Improvement Conference in Indianapolis, IN. For more information, contact:
ISPI
+1 (301) 587-8570
conference@ispi.org
www.ispi.org/AC2014

7 30 April–3 May
The **American Society for Indexing** (ASI) will be holding its annual conference in Charleston, SC. For more information, contact:
ASI
conference@asindexing.org
www.asindexing.org/

8 18–21 May
The **Society for Technical Communication** hosts the Technical Communication Summit at the Hyatt Regency Phoenix and Phoenix Convention Center in Phoenix, AZ. For more information, contact:
STC
+1 (703) 522-4114
http://summit.stc.org

* STC-related event

Transforming Yarn and Building Community

BY JAMYE SAGAN | *Senior Member*

WHEN I'M READY to unwind after a long day at work, I reach for my cocktail of yarn garnished with two pointy needles and start knitting. Why do I enjoy knitting? Besides being a great stress reliever, knitting is such a fulfilling activity for two main reasons—the journey of transforming yarn into an object and the sense of community it brings.

The Knitting Journey

First, I love transforming plain hanks of yarn into something I can wear or use. The actual knitting is only part of the process; the journey begins with picking out the perfect pattern and selecting the yarn (in no particular order).

The journey continues with knitting a test swatch. Just like storyboarding a training module helps outline the subject matter I need to cover, knitting a test swatch helps me make sure I have the proper gauge with the materials I have. Otherwise, I could end up with a sweater too big for even the Incredible Hulk! Plus, when I swatch, I can practice new pattern stitches so by the time I'm ready to knit my project I'm comfortable with the process.

Once I bind off my project, I still have to add the finishing touches—sewing up seams and weaving in yarn ends. The most magical part of the journey is blocking—wetting and pinning the knit fabric in shape to make stitches appear more uniform and more clearly define lace and cables. Just as editing helps polish a document, blocking makes a finished project look nicer. Some parts of the knitting journey seem tedious, but it's worth seeing people ooh and ahh over the final product.

Sense of Community

I also love the sense of community that knitting has brought to my life. In the past couple of years, I have made new friends through Ravelry (a social networking and resources site for yarn crafters, *www.ravelry.com*) and Knit Night gatherings at the local yarn store.

Just as STC has both live and virtual communities (chapters and SIGs), so does knitting! For instance, one group to which I belong meets every Saturday morning at Starbucks. Another group to which I belong hosts monthly get-togethers at either a restaurant or someone's house. It's great getting together with old friends and meeting new ones.

As for virtual communities, I belong to several groups on Ravelry, including a group for *Harry Potter* fans where we discuss the series and take part in various crafting challenges based on the books. Then we share photos and project descriptions with each another.

The author at a knitting meeting.

I've also taken part in the Ravellenic Games, an online challenge where participants start and finish various projects during the Olympic Games. Participants can earn virtual medals for feats such as knitting something with lace. During the last Ravellenic Games in 2012, I cast on a sleeveless shell during the opening ceremony and was wearing it in time for the closing ceremonies. Now I'm thinking about what projects to tackle during the Winter Games in Sochi, Russia.

As for my professional circle, I have met several STC members who also knit. Knitting—or talking about knitting—is a wonderful icebreaker. In fact, during the Honors Banquet at the last Summit, I wore a shawl that I had knitted. Several people had asked me where I got my shawl; I happily explained that I made it! Overall, knitting has helped me develop my social skills so I can better network with others.

Just as belonging to STC has helped me improve my professional skills, belonging to knitting communities has enabled me to hone my crafting skills. If I have a question about a new technique, I can go on Ravelry and ask on the forum boards. At the same time, I can share my knowledge by answering other people's questions. I love the whole collaborative atmosphere within the knitting community.

I could go on about knitting—in fact, while writing this I started thinking more about what knitting and technical communication have in common—enough for a separate column!

You can find Jamye on Ravelry as profmeowmeow and on Twitter as @gimli_the_kitty.

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